

WASHINGTON D.C. – Rep. Michael Honda (CA-15), vice-chair of the Appropriations Legislative Branch subcommittee, applauds the passage in the Senate of the Omnibus Appropriations Act, especially a provision to provide free access to Congress' legislative databases. Rep. Honda, who placed a measure in the House bill directing Congress, the Library of Congress and the Government Printing Office to make its data available to the public in raw form, is enabling the public to access government data in a more user-friendly format than the government's own.

Rep. Honda explained the importance of the legislation by saying, "This language is groundbreaking in that it supports the provision of unfiltered legislative information to the public. Instead of silo'ing the information and only allowing access through a limited web form, access to the raw data will make it easier for people to learn what their government is doing and to engage with their representatives in more meaningful and useful ways. In doing this, we hope to engage in a dialogue with the public about pending legislation so that we can create better policies that address the public's pressing problems."

Presently, constituents' official channel to learn about legislation is through a very limited search form, www.thomas.gov, while Congressional staffers maintain a more advanced system. While the public has been savvy about "screen scraping" more data, the information remains somewhat outdated and unreliable.

This bill will enhance public access to legislative documents, bill status, summary information, and other legislative data through more direct methods. The Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, and Government Printing Office and the appropriate entities of the House of Representatives are directed to prepare a report on the feasibility of providing advanced search capabilities. This report is to be provided to the Committees on Appropriations of the House and Senate within 120 days of the release of Legislative Information System 2.0.

Rep. Honda believes that making the raw databases available to the public serves that goal and will be working closely with the relevant agencies to assist in ensuring that the information that becomes available. Speaker Pelosi and House Democrats have been working to make Congress more transparent and ethical, and Rep. Honda will remain engaged in making government more accessible to the public.

In a final comment, Rep. Honda said, "The American people are our nation's greatest resource. Empowering the public with information can lead to better public policy. Representing the interests of constituents becomes easier when technology enables elected officials to tap into the knowledge and expertise of the public. The creative genius of the public sector will always surpass government capacity. By offering raw data to the public, innovative citizens can 'repurpose' this information in unexpectedly useful ways."